

The violence that exists on television and in the broadcast media has a profound and detrimental effect upon not only our children but also upon our society. The violence that is portrayed on television in an entertainment format gives children an unrealistic view of violence and its effects. Television shows are striving to be more “realistic” with the onslaught of the popular reality television genre. However in these efforts to provide more realistic scenarios they are not showing the whole reality. The gruesome and long-term effects of violence are not easily portrayed in a one hour television program. It is not as easy to bring a resolution to situations and solve problems in real life as they are portrayed to be on popular television programs. Also neglected on such programs are the wider, long-term effects violence has upon a person’s relationships, family, and community. Television does not and cannot accurately portray these realities. In turn children are mislead about the reality of violence. In true reality, the effects of violence can be devastating.

Furthermore, exposure to the prevalence of violence in the media results in desensitization. After a period of time with little exposure to violence and other offensive material in various media forms, it is a real shock to view even “common place” violence. (Which, unfortunately, is now frequently intertwined with other offensive or indecent material, such as foul language or horrific situations such as rape.) Moreover, our society is exposed to so much graphic and offensive material that a real life tragedy, such as the Columbine shootings in Colorado has little to no effect on far too many people. After you’ve seen so many things blow up on television, or so many people shot on television, it is very easy to remove yourself from the incident at hand, separating yourself from the image on the screen. The resulting desensitization allows some people to laugh at or dismiss terrible tragedies, even when shown on news programs.

Often the standard for what is acceptable on television, and thus permissible by the FCC, is what has been deemed commonly acceptable by the society as a whole. Does this lead to an accurate definition of violence? Better regulations and controls are necessary since the current regulations do not prevent or discourage broadcasters from displaying increasingly violent and objectionable material. This is due in part to the laxness of the FCC from holding violators accountable for so long. Each year new television programs push the limit of acceptability. Each time the limit is pushed farther than previously set due to inaction by the regulating agencies. Therefore, it is not only a matter of the public’s attitude and acceptance of violent and objectionable material that sets the standard, but also what the broadcasters are able to get away with. I do not believe that the American public has become so much more accepting of violent programs as much as it is that there are simply fewer alternatives.

Another item to be considered should be the measurement mechanism of public acceptability. The standard should not be gauged for the whole country on what is acceptable in New York City or Los Angeles. Is it a coincidence that these are also where a majority of programming is produced? “Real life” is not the same for someone living in New York as it is for someone living in Idaho. Thus the argument that these violent shows are no more violent than real life is left without much merit.

Undoubtedly, First Amendment rights need to be protected. Freedom of speech is an important part of our culture, heritage, and government. It is, however, unfortunate that many times the vocal minority who represent only one side of an issue see their rights being infringed upon. I am afraid that too often only those who represent the negative side of free speech have their rights protected. Rarely, if ever, do we see the rights of those who wish not to be exposed to offensive language and material protected. Those who wish to exercise their rights to not have offensive materials broadcast into their homes are often left out of the debate. These are they whose First Amendment rights are being trampled. Free speech debates are so often one sided in favor of those who wish to exploit the negative side of the issue. This should be included in the FCC discussion and consideration of the new regulations.

As stated previously, better enforced, better regulated standards are needed for broadcast media. A good case in point against “voluntary standards” is the movie rating system. The reliability and accuracy of this is laughable. If a director or a producer disagrees with the rating given by the ratings board, the director can appeal. What kind of standard is that? Furthermore, there is no real way to gage the content of a movie simply by its rating. A PG-13 allows for a wide range of possibilities. Some films with this rating may have

one offensive part or reference while another may be one reference short of receiving an R rating. Again, how effective can such a standard be? How can a parent who wants to limit their children's exposure to violence or offensive material be able to make a good decision when the standard is so variable in the ratings system? A voluntary system, therefore, is not the most effective way to regulate violent and sexual content in broadcast media. Having a set standard written and regulated by the FCC (or the Congress) would provide parents a reliable way by which to protect their children from materials they find objectionable. I support the FCC's adoption of set standards and its application of regulations as provided to it by the Congress of the United States. I also support the FCC's more vigilant enforcement of current regulations regarding violent and objectionable materials in broadcast media.